



Hill and Lewis & Clark County Sheriffs Mark Milestone on New Radio System

By E. Wing Spooner espooner@mt.gov

Lewis and Clark County Sheriff Leo Dutton and Hill County Sheriff Don Brostrom can identify with Alexander Graham Bell's experience the first time he heard a voice over a wire. On Tuesday, Oct. 28, the two sheriffs conducted a test of the new Interoperability Montana (IM) radio system using hand-held radios. The test was successful, with no interruptions and crystal clear conversation.

"It was like he was standing right next to me," Brostrom said. "It was hard to believe that some 200 miles separated us."

"We didn't even realize that our communications were encrypted," Dutton said. "Sometimes there can be some small distortions when using encryption, but there were none."

The event marked another milestone in Montana's effort to create a state-of-the-art emergency radio communication network that is capable of bridging this 147,000-square-mile state.

The ability of law enforcement and others responding in emergencies to communicate securely and seamlessly among various agencies is critical to ensuring the safety of these officials and the general public when crises, emergencies and disasters occur. That's the purpose behind efforts that have been under way for several years to upgrade public safety radio communications sites and equipment by using state-of-the-art technology to provide digital voice and data communications through a high-capacity microwave network throughout Montana.

The first installment of this ambitious project began in 2005 when the Lewis and Clark County radio system began operating. Additional user agencies were added through the summer of 2006, when it became operational county-wide.

About that same time, work began on installing the updated system along the northern tier of Montana. Huge geographic barriers in that region had to be overcome so that local public safety and emergency management representatives could communicate effectively in responding to emergencies and to improve homeland security by providing the means for military and civil authorities to communicate with each other along the U.S.-Canadian border.

"This test is historic," said Glacier County Sheriff Wayne Dusterhoff, project director of the Northern Tier Interoperability Consortium (NTIC). "This key-press demonstration is a testament to all the hundreds of hours that local jurisdictions have contributed to make the IM Project successful."

As a project director, Dusterhoff provides oversight and represents the communications needs of the 12 counties and four tribal nations. Representatives to the

consortium have been working to collaboratively build a shared communications system designed to improve the safety of their residents and the responders who serve them. The NTIC is one of nine consortia that make up the IM project.

The IM Project is governed by the Interoperability Montana Project Directors (IMPD), a dynamic, cohesive group dedicated to the deployment of statewide interoperability for public safety responders. This grass-roots partnership of local, tribal, and state government agencies is dedicated to a strategic deployment of Project 25, digital, secure voice and data communications across the state. The IMPD is chaired by Glendive Chief of Police Alan Michaels.

"Everyone recognizes that public and responder safety is important, and the ability to communicate seamlessly and effectively is vital to achieving the goal of public safety," said Michaels.

According to Michaels, funding is a critical issue. Grants from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), and FEMA Assistance to Fire Fighters as well as funding from the state legislature have all contributed to this \$150 million project designed to improve voice and data wireless services for emergency response personnel.

"Eventually, the network will cover the entire state," Michaels said. "We expect to have more than 100 tower sites by the end of the project. There are currently 17 trunked communications sites along the Northern Tier and an additional 40 some that are being worked on around the rest of the state," Michaels reported.

For more information about news coverage of this event, visit http://interop.mt.gov/im_education_and_outreach.mcp.x.

Eastern Tier Consortium Meeting

By E. Wing Spooner espooner@mt.gov

Members of the Eastern Tier Interoperability Consortium (ETIC) met in Glendive on Thurs. Oct. 9. Police Chief and IMPD Chair, Alan Michaels reported that an e-mail vote elected Denny Palmer, Richland County Sheriff's Office, as chair of the ETIC and Jim Skillestad, Dawson County Commissioner, as vice chair.

Eastern Tier and Public Safety Services Bureau (PSSB) representatives met with Fallon County Commissioners and others to discuss IM Project concerns about maintenance and benefits. Members also discussed the pros and cons of allowing the placement of a GPS locator on a tower. Guidelines are written to ensure that interference issues aren't created and to conform with Homeland Security guidelines.

Chief Michaels, Sherry Evans, Northrop Grumman, and Scott Bradford, PSSB, brought the group up to date on recent IM Governance accomplishments, such as obtaining sub-grantee Status, establishing a checking account, hiring Kevin Bruski as the Executive Director, and obtaining office space at the Montana Association of



Counties (MACo) building. Chief Michaels assisted at the IM booth at the recent MACo convention.

Scott Bradford provided an update on the status of build-out plans and frequencies for the Eastern Tier. He also said that a Motorola sub-contractor recently conducted evaluations on three site locations for the Second Master Controller. A report is due soon, which the IMPD will use for decision making. Members also were informed about recent efforts finalize completion dates with Harris-Stratex along the Northern Tier.

Denny Palmer gave a progress report on site agreements, which are almost entirely in place, and Sherry Evans provided an update on the Makoshika and Fallon towers. A team was assigned to begin work on a FEMA Assistance to Fire Fighters grant application for the ETIC. Dennis Palmer is now serving on the Training Sub-Committee, and he reported on upcoming an fleet mapping work session in Kalispell. Scott Bradford informed the group about the draft Sustainability Plan and encourage members to provide feedback.

The next ETIC meeting will be Wed., Nov. 12 at 10:00 am at the Dawson County Courthouse, 207 West Bell Street, in Glendive.

Sustainability Plan Work Session

By E. Wing Spooner espooner@mt.gov

Members of the IM Governance Committee met in Helena on Tues., Oct. 28 to continue work on the draft Sustainability Plan. Kerry O'Connell, SCMIC Project Director, George Gupton, WICC Project Director, Mark Adams, Northrop Grumman, and Scott Bradford, Chris Christensen and Wing Spooner, PSSB, all provided additional input to simplify and enhance the document. Bill Fleiner, Dept. of Corrections, and Bob Murdo, IM Legal Counsel, also provided direction and advice.

A draft of the plan is in distribution, and IM members are encouraged to provide feedback.

Interoperability Montana Finance Committee

By E. Wing Spooner, espooner@mt.gov

The Interoperability Montana Finance Committee met in Helena on Wed., Oct. 29 to continue work on unfinished business from its Oct. 6 meeting. Bill Fleiner, IM Finance Officer, reported that he and Irene Bushnell, Anderson ZurMuehlen (AZ), have been making great progress on developing accounting practices and programs. Two draft letters have been submitted to DES to enable it to award the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP) and FY08 Homeland Security grants to the Interoperability Montana (IM) Project.

The five-year budget is under development. It will consist of three parts: administration and expenses, operations and expenses (including system administrator, project management, and maintenance), and the build-out.

The RFP for project management with Northrop Grumman was cancelled, and a transition contract is underway whereby IM will bring on its own project managers. The National Guard will be funding some of these positions. The staffing sub-committee is moving forward with this job description as well as that of the system administrator.

Members discussed COPS Grant subscriber unit requests and approved a modification to the radio distribution to rectify two administrative errors. Participants also approved an invoice for the emergency repair of the ice shield at Pat's Knob. Then, discussion took place about modifications to the second-year Motorola maintenance contract to better meet the needs of the IM Project. In addition, the committee reviewed Phase 2 details of the Northern Tier combiner and system expansion work.

Bob McWilliams reported on the Five-Year Planning Work Session held in Billings on Oct. 21. Information gathered will be used in the development of the five-year budget. He also updated the group on PSIC grant build-out activities.

The next IM Finance Committee meeting is set for Wed., Nov. 5 from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm at the offices of Anderson ZurMuehlen (AZ), 828 Great Northern Blvd.

Upcoming Meetings

Nov. 4 (Tues.) – Election Day and State Holiday

Don't Forget to Vote!

Nov. 5 (Wed.)

IM Finance Committee

Helena • 9:00 am - Noon

Anderson & ZurMuehlen • 828 Great Northern Blvd.

Nov. 5 (Wed.)

IM Governance Committee

Helena • Noon - 5:00 pm • Dept. of Corrections

Annex Conf. Rm.; Behind 515 N. Sanders St.

Nov. 6 (Thurs.)

IM Project Directors (IMPD) Meeting

Helena • 9:00 am - 3:00 pm

State Capitol, Room 152

Nov. 6

Northern Tier Consortium (NTIC)

Havre • 9:00 am • Great Northern Inn, 1345 1st St.

Nov. 12

Central Consortium (CMICC)

Great Falls • 10:00 am • Wheat Building, 750 6th Street SW

Nov. 12

South Central Montana Consortium (SCMIC)

Bozeman • 10:00 am

Emergency Operations Center, 219 East Tamarack

Nov. 12

Eastern Tier Consortium

Glendive • 10:00 am - 12:00 noon

Dawson County Courthouse, 207 West Bell Street

Nov. 13

I-15/90 Corridor Consortium

Butte • 10:00 am • Chamber of Commerce; 1000 George St.